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COMMITTEE AGAINST TORTURE

Tenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIRST PART (PUBLIC)* OF THE 148th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 26 April 1993, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. VOYAME

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* The summary record of the second part (closed) of the meeting appears as document CAT/C/SR.148/Add.1.

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES RELATING TO THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS (agenda item 9) (continued)

1. Mr. SORENSEN, reporting on the fourth session of the Preparatory Committee for the World Conference on Human Rights, noted that at the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, an agenda had finally been agreed for the World Conference on Human Rights to be held in Vienna from 14 to 25 June 1993. That had enabled the Preparatory Committee, at its fourth session to work within the framework of both an agenda and rules of procedure, and to consider its draft final document. Deliberations had centred on whether the document should be based on the input thus far from previous sessions of the Preparatory Committee, other official submissions, including the document prepared by the Committee against Torture (A/CONF.157/PC/62/Add.3) and the reports drawn up at the three regional meetings in Bangkok, San José and Tunis (A/CONF.157/PC/59, 58, and 57 respectively) or the note by the Secretary-General (A/CONF.157/PC/82). The final decision was that the draft document would be based on the reports from the regional meetings, but document A/CONF.157/PC/82 would be used as a working paper on the basis of which all information from the regional reports could be included.

2. The meeting of the chairpersons and representatives of the human rights treaty bodies held on 22 and 23 April, which he had attended on Mr. Voyame's behalf, had suggested specific amendments to the secretariat's basic document, a list of which would be circulated to members forthwith. Various aspects were of particular interest to the Committee against Torture, including the suggested additional paragraph reading: "One of the most atrocious violations against human dignity is the act of torture, the result of which destroys the dignity and impairs the capability of the victims to continue their lives or their work. In order to facilitate the work of human rights as described in this document, the United Nations should aim at eradicating the crime of torture on an urgent basis."

3. Nowhere in the document was there any mention of eradicating torture by the year 2000, the date proposed by the Committee against Torture in document A/CONF.157/PC/62/Add.3, since it was felt that a time-limit seemed implicitly to condone acts of torture committed before then. The proposed amendment to principle 19 would also be welcomed by the Committee, as it emphasized in stronger terms than in the original document the need for "effective and enforceable remedies, including redress and compensation" and "psychological and social rehabilitation" for victims of torture. Finally, of particular relevance to the Committee, was the proposed insertion of a new paragraph in the section on cooperation, development and strengthening of human rights, which aimed at building a bridge between those countries which regarded civil human rights as a top priority and those which accorded them lesser importance. By and large, the views and concerns of the Committee against Torture had been reflected in the proposals, which had been unanimously agreed by all the human rights treaty bodies represented at the meeting.

4. The CHAIRMAN reminded members of the need to nominate a person or persons to represent the Committee at the World Conference on Human Rights.

5. Mr. BURNS, supported by Mr. DIPANDA MOUELLE, said that the obvious candidate was Mr. Sorensen in view of his active participation in, and contributions to, the preparatory committees.

6. The CHAIRMAN said that he agreed with the nomination but was still uncertain whether the Committee was entitled to send more than one representative. Given the traditional antagonism exhibited in world forums, between developed and developing countries, it would be more diplomatic for the Committee to send two delegates, one representing a developed and one representing a developing country. However, the deciding consideration in that respect would be financial.

7. Mr. LORENZO said that since financial matters had to be referred to the secretariat, consultations would have to be held prior to any decision. However, if that course was financially viable, it would be preferable to send the Chairman and Vice-Chairmen as representatives to ensure that geographical distribution was respected.

8. Mr. DIPANDA MOUELLE said that the number and identity of the Committee's representative or representatives depended, to a large extent, on how many representatives other human rights treaty bodies intended to send.

9. Ms. KLEIN-BIDMON (Representative of the Secretary-General) said that other human rights treaty bodies were at the same stage in their deliberations on their representatives; members should not, however, lose sight of the fact that the World Conference had a limited budget. It seemed that finance would be provided for, and invitations extended to, the Chairpersons of human rights treaty bodies or the representatives chosen by those bodies. In response to Mr. Burns' question whether a committee could, if it had the necessary resources, send more than one representative, she said that it was unlikely that the Committee's budget, made up of contributions from States parties could meet such expenditure.

10. Mr. MIKHAILOV agreed that the Committee's representative should logically be Mr. Sorensen, but considered that it was possibly more appropriate for the Chairman to attend the Conference on the Committee's behalf. If that was not acceptable to the Committee, it should consider the possibility of nominating Mr. Voyame in his personal capacity, in view of his outstanding record on human rights activities.

11. The CHAIRMAN thanked members of the Committee for their support but pointed out that prior engagements coinciding with the World Conference made it impossible for him to accept the nomination. Limited finances seemed, unfortunately, to rule out any possibility of the Committee sending more representatives in addition to the one representative to be financed by the budget of the World Conference. However, there was no reason why members of the Committee should not represent its interests if they were attending the Conference in another capacity.

12. Mr. EL IBRASHI, supported by Mr. MIKHAILOV suggested that all members of the Committee should be invited officially, in writing, to attend the Conference; if their countries were in a position to finance them or they were able to finance themselves they would be able to participate and there would be no further need to draw on the Committee's budget.

13. Mr. DIPANDA MOUELLE agreed that the Committee's representative at the Conference should be its Chairman, as would be the case with other bodies. As to possible invitations to other members of the Committee, he proposed that Mr. El Ibrashi and Mr. Mikhailov should attend. He also thought that, if possible, the relevant communications should be sent by diplomatic pouch for the sake of speed.

14. Ms. KLEIN-BIDMON (Representative of the Secretary-General) said that other Committees, too, had expressed a wish to send as many members as possible to the Conference; but the Secretary-General had stressed that only one person - the Chairman or his appointed representative - could attend from each Committee. She could, however, transmit, the Committee's request to be informed whether further members could attend the Conference if their expenses were met by themselves or their countries.

15. The CHAIRMAN invited the representative of the Secretary-General to do so and, at the same time, inquire whether the number of places available at the Conference was restricted.

16. Mr. BURNS said that he would be attending the Conference, but in another capacity, at no cost to the Committee.

17. Following a brief discussion in which the CHAIRMAN, Mr. MIKHAILOV, Mr. LORENZO, Mr. BURNS, Mr. KHITRIN and Mr. EL IBRASHI took part, the CHAIRMAN suggested that the Committee should postpone further consideration of the matter until the next day.

18. It was so agreed.

The public meeting rose at 4.10 p.m.